

In A Year by GhostGrantaire

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Summary:

They loved each other as much as ever, that hadn't changed. But they weren't happy, and the thought of it drove Jonathan crazy. He would stay up late at night, mind on fire with worry and anxiety and the constant dread of "we're not going to make it."

In A Year

Author's Note:

You know in a year, it's gonna be better
You know in a year, I'm gonna be happy
-Stranger, Noah and the Whale

notes: this is placed in the universe where the ot3
becomes full-time monster hunters after high school

Jonathan guessed it started when they visited Steve's cousin Andrew in Florida. He'd just had a kid, and Steve wanted to meet the new baby Harrington, so the trio took a break from monster hunting for a week and drove down. It had been a great trip— Andrew was one of the less-crazy people in that family, and baby Henry was absolutely adorable. Steve had bonded with the kid in no time flat, and it was like he'd found his calling with the kid.

They'd gotten back on the road quickly enough, but something changed after that. They'd had their differences before— people tend to have low spots when you've been together for five whole years— but it was more noticeable now. Steve had been getting less and less eager about their jobs. When they'd wander around small towns across the country, he'd point some of them out, making a casual comment about nice places to live and raise a family. The comments always seemed to put Nancy in a bad mood, and things would be tense until Jonathan changed the subject. They argued more, and while they always apologized and forgave each other, they never really seemed to move past anything.

They loved each other as much as ever, that hadn't changed. But they weren't happy, and the thought of it drove Jonathan crazy. He would stay up late at night, mind on fire with worry and anxiety and the constant dread of "we're not going to make it."

They were hunting a monster in Detroit when Steve got thrown off a bridge into a creek. Nancy and Jonathan had finished the job quickly and sprinted to him, minds immediately jumping to conclusions, but he'd been okay. Unconscious, with a broken leg and a concussion, but

okay.

They all knew it'd take him some time to recover, and crammed in the backseat of a crappy car with no air conditioning wasn't the place to do that, so he'd gone home to stay with his mother and rest while Jonathan and Nancy stayed on the road.

They were apart for a month, with a few phone calls or postcards to check in. Jonathan could tell Nancy was restless about the absence, and Jonathan shared the feeling, but sometimes at night he would find it a bit easier to breathe. He wasn't worried about the next time Steve would try to bring up settling down or Nancy would go out of her way to find a job to avoid conversations about the three of them. But he didn't like to think about that.

When Steve was fully recovered, they drove down to Hawkins to pick him up. Jonathan didn't really know what to expect. He had gotten that terrible feeling in his stomach that something was wrong, something was wrong, and he couldn't fix it. The feeling only intensified when Steve met them at the door, a nervous and sick look on his face.

"I met someone." Jonathan had never forgotten the way those words sounded on Steve's lips. He knew it was coming, or something along those lines at least, but there was no way to prepare himself for how much pain that would bring.

Steve had explained the whole thing. How it didn't really mean anything, she was just a friend he'd made, she wanted a family as desperately as he did, on and on and on. Jonathan hadn't been able to say a thing in return, just taking in the whole thing with a nauseous sort of understanding.

Nancy hadn't reacted well.

"If you want a family then we'll have a damn family!"

"It's not the same and you know it, Nancy," Steve had shot back, a pained look on his face. Jonathan could tell he hadn't wanted to fight. Not about this. "We can't just... we'd have to go back to pretending we're not together, and you know how terrible that was!"

You want it to be me and you, and Jonathan's the other guy who lives with us that we never quite manage to explain? You want Jonathan to never be able to say that's my kid without it being a huge ordeal?"

Jonathan flinched at the thought, but still hadn't said anything.

"Then we don't lie!" Nancy had yelled back. She was crying by that point.

"Great, so then the neighbors and the schools and everyone gets concerned about the 'implications' of our lifestyle and whether it's healthy or not to raise a kid? You know what happens to people like me and Jonathan. Add you to the mix, and that makes it even worse. I don't want to do that to us." Steve was practically begging.

"So that's it then? You're just going to leave?"

Jonathan felt a wave of nausea wash over him, and he'd bolted out of the room, unable to listen to anymore.

He'd found Steve later that night, hunched over the table with a beer abandoned beside him. He wasn't sure where Nancy had gone to, but he'd worry about her later. Steve was sobbing, and Jonathan's heart clenched terribly at the sight, feeling his eyes burn with tears. He felt like he hadn't stopped crying that whole day.

"I love you," Steve had whispered when Jonathan had sat beside him, gripping his hand tightly. "I love you, and I love Nancy, and I don't want to let you go."

"I know," Jonathan had managed, voice cracking.

Steve looked up at him. "It was always going to be you or me. Nancy doesn't get that, but you did, didn't you? Nancy was always a certainty, but for us... we were always going to run out of time. We were always going to have to choose."

Jonathan had gotten bitten by monsters, thrown down flights of stairs, even shot in the leg, but he couldn't remember anything more painful than those words. Because Steve was right. Jonathan had always known it too, deep deep down. But he'd never had to deal

with it until right then.

He'd gotten the news over the phone from his mother, seven months later when him and Nancy were in Washington renting a small cabin. He could tell there'd been something off from the start of the conversation, her phrases a bit too hesitant and forced. Finally she'd come out and said it, blurting it all out quickly. He'd hung up the phone shortly after that.

Nancy walked in five minutes later, lunch in her hands.

"Steve's getting married," he said, not sure what else to say.

She didn't say anything. They were quiet before Nancy grabbed her gun out of her suitcase and stormed out to the backyard. He'd heard six solid shots ring out before it was quiet. She'd stayed outside for ten minutes before coming back in, her eyes and nose bright red. She climbed into his lap without a word and they'd embraced each other tightly for an indefinite amount of time.

Please join us on Sunday, May 19th, 1991 to celebrate the wedding of Diane Noll and Steve Harrington...

The invitation burned into Jonathan's mind the entire way back to Indiana. Nancy was quiet in the passenger's seat as they drove towards home. They were planning on stopping in Hawkins first to meet up with their family and then they'd drive up with Nancy's parents, Joyce, and Hopper, who'd all decided to attend.

His mother had hugged him far longer than usual when she'd seen him, and Jonathan had seen Karen do the same for Nancy.

The venue was beautiful. It was more elegant than what Jonathan had originally expected, but he suspected a lot of it was because of Steve's parents. The Harringtons were the first people Jonathan had spotted, though they'd done nothing but nod sharply at him before embracing a couple that he suspected to be the bride's parents.

Him and Nancy had greeted a few more members of Steve's extended family, shrugging off the label of "Steve's old friends" with some difficulty.

They found Steve not too long after arriving. He'd just finished getting ready it seemed, and Jonathan had frozen when they spotted him, feeling Nancy do the same. Steve stared at them for a long moment, crossing to them slowly.

"Hey guys," he managed after a second. "I'm... I'm really glad you're here."

Jonathan knew he meant it. He was smiling at the both of them with a sort of wistfulness that couldn't be faked. He nodded, taking a moment to smile back. He hugged Steve tightly, feeling the taller man let out a happy laugh before he hugged Nancy. Nancy embraced him for a long while, closing her eyes, and Jonathan stared at the two of them, heart aching painfully.

"Are you ready?" Nancy had asked when they broke apart. Steve gave a nervous laugh and raised a hand as if to ruffle his hair before putting it down again, probably remembering that he didn't have time to fix it again.

"As ready as I'll ever be, honestly," Steve had said, exhaling loudly, like he couldn't believe what he was doing.

Jonathan hadn't known what to say to that, but luckily Steve's mother had shown up to whisk her son away. Jonathan took Nancy's hand in his and together they made their way inside to take their seats.

The wedding was perfect. Everything went off without a hitch, and everyone looked beautiful, especially the bride and the groom. Jonathan had to smile at how nervous Steve looked through the ceremony, eyes darting around anxiously, but he slowly relaxed as it went on. Diane looked stunning, though she seemed a bit nervous as well, letting out a couple nervous giggles, which Steve echoed back. They'd only met the bride once before, but Jonathan knew she had that same kind of infectious laughter as Steve did.

Nancy was still and quiet through the whole thing. While Diane was saying her vows, Jonathan glanced at his girlfriend. She was biting her bottom lip harshly, eyes fixed unwaveringly on the couple. Jonathan knew what she was thinking about. That could've been her, and in some people's opinions, it should've been her. Almost everyone in Hawkins had predicted that Nancy would wind up marrying Steve, including Jonathan at one point. It made sense. But here they were.

He slipped his hand into hers, taking a deep breath when she squeezed it back so tightly it verged on painful.

"I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride!"

Jonathan looked away.

If the ceremony had been the Harringtons' idea, the reception had been purely Steve's. It was fun, truly a party, with mostly upbeat music, radiant lights, drinks all around. Everyone was laughing, and only partly due to the open bar. The entire place was filled with a positive energy that made you want to get up and dance.

Diane's mother had given a speech, followed by Steve's cousin, who was his best man. Steve had asked Jonathan if he would do it, but when Jonathan had hesitated, he'd backed down.

"I get it," Steve had assured him. "You'd probably hate making that stupid speech anyways, I'm not gonna make you do it. But it is you, you know, I mean... you're my best man."

After that, Steve and Diane (Diane Harrington, his mind kept reminding him) had their first dance, predictably to a cheesy Journey song that made Jonathan snort into his wine glass. The couple grinned at each other through the whole thing, moving gracefully together, like they were in their own world.

The dance floor filled with people after that, but Jonathan and Nancy stayed sitting for the most part. Nancy danced once with her father, and Jonathan took the time to dance with his mother, but it felt

strange to dance together at Steve's wedding. When they were around other people, it was easier to fake smiles and laughs. But just looking at Nancy and holding her would just remind Jonathan of how much everything had changed.

Steve had made his way over to them eventually, the grin on his face softening to something more genuine when he stopped in front of them. "Nancy," he said, nodding to the floor. A slower song had just started and the place was flooding with couple. "Would you dance with me?"

Nancy took a deep breath, looking anxious, but had gotten to her feet anyway. Jonathan watched them as Steve slipped an arm around her waist and Nancy rested her hand on his shoulder, looking pained.

"Would you like to dance, Jonathan?" He looked up in surprise at Diane, who was smiling hopefully down at him. He hadn't even noticed her arrival, he'd been so caught up in the others. "While my husband's otherwise occupied?"

He blinked at her, not sure what to say. He hated dancing, especially in public, and he didn't think it would be much better being the partner of his ex-boyfriend's wife.

He gave a tiny glance to where the other two were dancing. Steve was watching them, an anxious look in his eyes, and Jonathan realized how much this meant to him. He looked back at Diane with a smile and got to his feet. "Sure."

It was awkward, honestly. Jonathan was still a terrible dancer, even after years of Steve's "lessons," but Diane didn't seem to mind. They'd settled into some sort of weird off-beat swaying, but it looked like she couldn't care less. He appreciated it.

"I'm so glad you're here," she said after quite a long silence. Jonathan frowned in confusion. They were practically strangers. They'd gotten along without any real problems when Steve had introduced them, but still. "Steve was so happy you guys made it. You really mean the world to him."

Jonathan just nodded. He knew he should probably reply, say

something along the lines of “we’re happy we made it too,” but he couldn’t bring himself to.

“You look wonderful,” he said after a second. That was something you said to a bride, right? He expanded after a second. “You two look wonderful together.”

She’d smiled at the compliment, and he went back to focusing on his steps.

The song ended and Jonathan lowered his arm from her waist, stepping back. Steve and Nancy were still close together, talking sincerely as they looked at each other, but Nancy looked like she was smiling, and that was something. Jonathan wasn’t about to break that up. He looked back at Diane.

“I may get more wine, do you want any?” He offered unsurely.

“I’d, um, better not, actually.” She emphasized the words awkwardly, looking at him hesitantly. It took Jonathan a second to catch up.

“You’re...” He looked over at Steve, mouth open, before glancing back at the bride, who was blushing at this point. “I didn’t know—”

“I haven’t told him yet,” she admitted quickly. “I figured we should get through one thing at a time, you know? I mean, I know he wants it and all but... it seems a bit fast, don’t you think?”

She was shaking her head, looking suddenly worried and Jonathan didn’t hesitate before reaching out and squeezing her hand. He may be practically a stranger to this woman, but she had just entrusted him with something special, and he knew how much it meant. “Diane. He’s going to be ecstatic. You’re going to make him so, so happy.”

Diane broke out into a stunning smile and before Jonathan knew what was happening she embraced him tightly. He hugged her back, a bit less enthusiastically, trying to stay happy. This was what Steve had always wanted. He was getting the life he deserved.

When they broke apart, Steve and Nancy were walking back to them. They were both smiling, but there was a hint of sadness on both of

their faces. Jonathan wondered what they'd been talking about, but he knew he wouldn't ask. If Nancy wanted to tell him, she would.

Steve and Diane left to mingle after that, and Jonathan turned to Nancy. He wordlessly held out a hand, and she took it, folding gracefully into his side as they began to sway to the music. It wasn't so bad, dancing.

"How are you doing?" Jonathan asked quietly, pressing his forehead against her hair.

Nancy took a shaky breath before responding. "Better. You?"

"Better," he repeated back to her. He pulled back and looked at her, unsurprised to see her eyes sparkling with unshed tears. He knew he looked the same.

They shared a sad smile before glancing over to where Steve was talking with his parents, his arm looped around Diane's waist.

"He's happy," Jonathan commented, though it didn't really need to be said. Steve was radiating joy and love, and had been the entire night. It hurt to look at, in a way, but his happiness had always been infectious, and Jonathan really couldn't help but feel his heart swell at the sight.

"I know," Nancy responded quietly. They had stopped moving but didn't let go of each other. Jonathan couldn't have let her go at that moment if he wanted to. Nancy looked at him sadly. "I'm happy for him. I really am, and I know it's selfish, but... I wanted him to be happy with us. I wanted us to make him that happy."

Her voice cracked slightly, and he frowned at her in thought.

He thought of all of the long car rides, the cramped beds, the bad signals on the motel televisions. He thought of the hurried breakfasts, the bickering over directions, the ways they'd snap at each other after a long and difficult job only to fall into each other's arms the next second. He thought of the cuddling and the kissing, the laughing and the crying, the hugs that never seemed to end. He thought about the ways they said I love you— whether shouted or whispered or scrawled

on post-it-notes.

“Nancy, he was,” Jonathan replied. “We did.”

They had been happy. And they would be happy again.

Author's Note:

I'm actually really happy with how this turned out. It was originally posted to my tumblr, which you can go follow [here](#)!